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New York

President: Mr. Lajčák ..... (Slovakia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Tevi (Vanuatu), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 70 (*continued*)

Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

Commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

The Acting President: The General Assembly is meeting to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and to hold a debate on promoting tolerance, inclusion, unity and respect for diversity in the context of combating racial discrimination, in accordance with paragraph 26 of resolution 72/157, of 19 December 2017.

I am speaking on behalf of the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, who cannot join us today due to urgent business in his home country.

The origin of this Day reminds us how far we have come. Apartheid laws are a thing of the past. We must make sure that such a system never takes root again anywhere in the world. Unfortunately, we are still dealing with the fallout from racist laws, policies and thinking today. Legacies of genocide, slavery and other race-based atrocities continue to haunt us. However, in this forum, we have an opportunity to recommit to ending racial discrimination forever.

Our celebration is particularly poignant this year, since we are marking the passing of 100 years since Nelson Mandela was born. The principles that we can learn from his life include tolerance, inclusion, unity and respect for diversity. It is also 70 years since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which promotes human dignity and worth, equality and non-discrimination, among other things. Those are the values by which we must live. We all have a role to play.

The United Nations has the tools to combat racial discrimination. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination entered into force almost 50 years ago. Since then, we have adopted the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. And one of the bases of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is non-discrimination. However, we must act on those words. We must stand up for the young man who is overlooked in a job interview because of the colour of his skin and for the girl excluded from society or suffering violence only because of her race. The ill-treatment of people based on their race does not occur in silos. It affects every aspect of our lives — from development to peace and human rights for all.

Today's debate highlights the importance of dialogue and multilateral engagement in combating racism. The General Assembly is the most representative and most diverse organ of the United Nations. All 193 Member States are represented here. It is fitting that we are having the debate in this forum. In this Hall, we are all equal. No one is better than any of us and none of us are better than anyone else.

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Its wide range of views improves the work of the General Assembly and bolsters its legitimacy. Respect and tolerance for the differences of others therefore lie at the heart of the General Assembly. Dialogue goes hand in hand with multilateralism. We should speak openly about racial discrimination. More importantly, we must listen to our neighbours and friends in this global village to hear the stories that reveal our common humanity despite our own uniqueness and differences. Likewise, in our nations, cities and villages, we should open our eyes and ears to engage with others. That provides avenues for cohesion, inclusion and integration. It counters discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance. The dialogue must include children and young people. It is important that we equip people from a young age with the knowledge to combat racial discrimination.

In conclusion, the United Nations has a duty to ensure that racial discrimination is consigned to the past. We have many tools at our disposal — from dialogue to multilateral engagement and seminal agreements and plans. Let us use the most diverse platform in the world to ensure the equal treatment of all.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination commemorates the Sharpeville massacre — the horrific killing of 69 people peacefully demonstrating against apartheid in South Africa. The apartheid regime was based on institutionalized racial discrimination. Thankfully, it was ultimately consigned to history thanks to the release from prison and accession to the presidency of Nelson Mandela, whose centennial we mark this year.

The memory of Sharpeville lives on in this annual observance by the United Nations when we reaffirm our unequivocal rejection of all forms of racism, xenophobia and intolerance. Sadly, such attitudes persist in countries and among communities around the world. A stark and tragic example lies in the egregious treatment of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar.

It is time for all nations and all people to live up to the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognizes the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human race. This year marks the seventieth anniversary of that landmark document. We have made considerable progress since it was adopted. People around the world have gained greater freedoms and equality. Conditions of profound economic misery and exploitation have been improved. Women's rights have advanced, along with the rights of children, victims of racial and religious discrimination, indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities. Perpetrators of horrific human rights violations have been prosecuted by international criminal tribunals.

However, it is also clear that the words of the Universal Declaration are not yet matched by the facts on the ground. In practice, people all over the world still endure constraints on, or even the total denial, of their human rights. Gender inequality remains a pressing issue, with an untold number of women and girls facing daily insecurity, violence and the violation of their rights. We are also seeing an alarming rise in xenophobia, racism and intolerance, including anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim hatred. Far-right political parties and neo-Nazi viewpoints are seeing a resurgence. Refugees and migrants are systematically denied their rights and unjustly and falsely vilified as threats to the societies that they seek to join, despite the proven benefits that they bring. We still have a long way to go before we end the discriminatory attitudes, actions and practices that blight our world.

On this International Day, let us all consider how we can better promote tolerance, inclusion and respect for diversity in all nations and among all communities. Let us work to eliminate messages of hatred and the concept of "us and them" — the false attitude that we can accept some and reject and exclude others simply for how they look, where they worship or whom they love. Let us keep in mind the grave consequences of racist thinking, such as discrimination, slavery and genocide. We must always stand up to leaders who spread their toxic vision of racial superiority, especially when they couch it in sanitized language in order to denigrate migrants and foreigners. We must protect young people from those forces of intolerance and division. We cannot allow extremist ideologies to become normalized and legitimized in our societies.

The answer is to preach and to practice tolerance, inclusion and respect for diversity. That is achieved through greater debate and openness and the exchange of different views, experiences and perspectives. It is also achieved through leadership — the kind of leadership admirably shown by Nelson Mandela — that is sufficiently courageous and principled to counter intolerance, racism and discrimination in all its forms. That is what the Organization stands for.

The Acting President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

In accordance with resolution 72/157, I now call on Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, to make a statement.

Mr. Al Hussein (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights): The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose seventieth year we are commemorating, begins with a clear statement in article 1 of both principle and fact: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. That is underscored by the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which states that

> "any doctrine of superiority based on racial differentiation is scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially unjust and dangerous ... there is no justification for racial discrimination, in theory or in practice, anywhere".

Those fundamental texts have helped millions of people to obtain freedom from the violence, injustice and impoverishment that is based on the repugnant idea that there are lesser races of human beings. Today, however, xenophobia and discrimination on the basis of race, ethnic or national origin or religion have been increasing to acutely disturbing levels and are often actively promoted for political profit by politicians and officials. Hatred is being directed at migrants. Muslim communities are being stereotyped, vilified and attacked. Anti-Semitic slurs are again on the rise and other religious minorities, such as Christians, are also suffering rising discrimination and violence in some regions. Meanwhile, even in some of the most prosperous societies, deep-seated structural racism continues to be inflicted on indigenous peoples, people of African descent and other minorities.

Wherever a child is humiliated and made to feel unworthy of equal treatment because of the colour of his skin or the community of her birth; wherever whole groups of people are treated with contempt and denied equal access to justice, employment, housing, voting rights or citizenship; wherever there is discrimination and incitement to hatred, the fundamental premise of the Charter of the United Nations to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours is being denied.

Racial discrimination is not only a matter of individual injustice. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights makes it very clear that if rights are not protected conflict may follow. Experience has repeatedly demonstrated that discrimination, intolerance, prejudice and scapegoating not only lead to disastrous splintering within societies, endangering national cohesion, but also frequently generate threats to regional peace and lead to conflict. I encourage all decision-makers to reflect on their commitments to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, which in 2001 reaffirmed that the "[p]reservation and promotion of tolerance, pluralism and respect for diversity can produce more inclusive societies".

The history of every State Member of the United Nations has been shaped by the shifting forces of human movement across borders and oceans. Every society is multifaceted, with different communities standing proud in their identity and contributing to common goals. The active embrace of diversity, which we term tolerance, is the great marker of strong and stable societies in which every individual is empowered to contribute through full participation.

I would like to recall one of the giants of human rights, Nelson Mandela, who led his country from the brink of catastrophe by the sheer force of his principled leadership and the power of his ideas. Together with my predecessor Mary Robinson, Nelson Mandela set out a vision for tolerance and diversity in the twenty-first century that I urge all leaders to consult.

We can push back against the forces of hatred, bigotry and violence, and instead build societies that rest on equality and justice. To free ourselves and our fellow human beings from the crushing injustice of discrimination, we must dismantle the attitudes of racial, ethnic and religious prejudice in our societies. We must work constantly to genuinely prioritize messages and policies that uphold mutual respect. We must live up to the promises of inclusion that are at the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. There is no more urgent task for the sake of humankind's survival on the planet we all share.

The Acting President: I would now like to consult with members on inviting the following speakers to make statements in accordance with paragraph 26 of resolution 72/157, and as mentioned in the letter from the President of the General Assembly dated 9 March: Ms. Tendayi Achiume, Special

Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and Ms. Gay McDougall, member of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Without setting a precedent, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to invite those speakers to make statements at this meeting?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

Ms. Achiume (Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance): It is a profound honour and privilege to stand before the General Assembly today for the first time as Special Rapporteur on the occasion commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. I would like to thank the President of the Assembly for organizing today's event and look forward to its being illuminating and lively.

Globally, racial equality is under attack. Vile discourse of explicit hatred and ideologies of racial supremacy have moved from the fringe to the mainstream. Today racial, ethnic and religious bigotry fuels human rights violations, including extreme violence against minorities, refugees, migrants, stateless persons and the internally displaced, with a particularly acute effect on women and sexual- and gender-diverse populations.

Such bigotry is unashamed. From crowds of youth marching to neo-nazi chants in Charlottesville, Warsaw and Berlin to the racist and xenophobic attitudes of politicians at the highest level of office; from the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims to the excessive use of military force to police Afro-descendant communities in different parts of the world, the assault on the human dignity of millions has reached alarming proportions. The recent gruesome assassination of Marielle Franco, the powerful, courageous and committed Afro-Brazilian anti-racism activist, was just one example of the fatal terror that is the daily reality of indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants and racial, national, religious and ethnic communities all over the world. Marielle Franco and the many others who have died for racial equality deserve justice.

The escalation of explicit racism and xenophobia makes the celebration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination all the more important. This year, the International Day coincides with the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the celebration of what would have been the hundredth birthday of Nelson Mandela, a leader whose vision of and commitment to substantive racial equality should remain a force of inspiration for leaders around the world, including those here in this Hall, to complete the work that defined his life.

The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination calls for unity locally, nationally and globally, and for affirmation of the principles of human dignity, substantive equality and non-discrimination. The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination should serve as a reminder that the problem of racism remains larger and deeper than the shocking manifestations that we witness daily in the media and even in mainstream national political discourse.

Now more than ever, the fight against racial discrimination must be understood and waged at the structural level, even in the current alarming climate, which risks focusing global attention only on the most explicit and individual occasions of discrimination and intolerance. States, civil-society organizations, social movements and activists, as well as the entire United Nations system, must devote renewed energy and attention to tackling the structural drivers of racial inequality, including, as recognized by the 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, those rooted in the history and legacy of slavery and colonialism.

At the same time, urgent global attention must also be paid to the structural, economic, political and legal conditions that facilitate misplaced racial resentment and xenophobic scapegoating by national populations that perceive minorities and non-nationals as existential threats. For those committed to advancing human rights, that means taking seriously the grievances and economic marginalization of those who have been most harmed by globalized neoliberal policies that protect capital and neglect labour and those whose austerity measures have impoverished many communities that do not benefit from the networks of advantage and patronage that benefit global financial elites.

It also means confronting the fact that the rise of populist nationalism has at least as much to do with the widespread loss of faith in establishment politics that privilege elites as it has with the offensive xenophobic rhetoric of extremist ideologues. That is especially evident in the context of the backlash in various parts of the world against refugees and involuntary migrants, where gaps in existing international legal frameworks combine with shortsighted national policies to reinforce chaotic and dangerous movements. That chaos heightens anti-migrant anxieties.

Let me speak bluntly. Human rights campaigns promoting cohesion alone in a context of broader escalating migration restrictions will not work. Combating discrimination against migrants and all other marginalized groups requires structural reforms that incentivize cohesion and make it a fundamental logic for Government policy and private-sector involvement in any given community and society.

It is incumbent on States, including through the ongoing negotiations on the global compacts for migration and on refugees, to provide legal pathways for migration and to take other concrete steps necessary to create an international framework that prioritizes substantive equality for all. One such important step would be including an explicit reference in the global compact for migration to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, as a source of important human rights standards that States must respect, promote and fulfil, even in the context of international migration.

States and other actors must also remain vigilant and redouble their efforts with respect to addressing the structural manifestations of racial discrimination and inequality, all of which are prohibited under international human rights law. Putting an end to racial profiling by law-enforcement agents is just as urgent as ending violent hate crimes perpetrated by private actors. Denouncing xenophobic Muslim bans implemented through immigration policies that rely on offensive and flawed assumptions about entire religious groups is just as urgent as denouncing explicit anti-Semitic or Islamophobic statements made by political leaders. Putting an end to the forced displacement and cultural extinction of racial or ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples that result from extraction and construction projects driven by Governments and multinational corporations is just as urgent as addressing the resurgence of neo-Nazism. There should be no compromises in the pursuit of racial equality today. The world cannot afford to ignore any dimension of the problem of racism, xenophobia and related intolerance, and especially not the forces that do the effective work of structurally subordinating groups on the basis of their race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation or citizenship status.

Resurgent hatred and the structural racial and xenophobic discrimination that operates alongside it threatens more than just the specific groups that are their direct target. Extremism and systemic racial exclusion threaten the very political and legal foundations of every single State that forms a part of our international order. In the light of the current alarming context, I have decided to address the impact of populist nationalism on racial equality and related human rights concerns in my first report to the General Assembly, which I will present in October. In the coming months, I will be soliciting the input of Member States, along with relevant stakeholders, in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the human rights problem so as to formulate concrete and appropriate recommendations.

Similarly, my first report to the Human Rights Council in June will address the various means through which citizenship, nationality and immigration laws today are high-functioning means of racial and ethnic exclusion that often target groups that have historically been discriminated against. The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination requires States to recommit to upholding the fundamental principles of human rights, which include a guarantee of the substantive equality of all, regardless of race, ethnic or national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, citizenship and any other social grounds that are traditionally deployed to systemically subordinate groups in society.

I strongly encourage that recommitment through avenues such as the International Decade for People of African Descent and through committed, good-faith engagement with anti-racist human rights processes within the United Nations. That includes agreeing to country visits from special procedures mandate holders and substantive compliance with the reporting process to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

I would like to take this opportunity to warmly thank the Government of the United Kingdom for its

invitation to be the venue for my first official visit, in early May. I very much look forward to constructive and fruitful dialogue. I also want to ensure all Member States that I remain enthusiastic about joint engagement and collaboration in the fight against racism, especially through official visits, and it is my sincere hope that invitations will be forthcoming.

The time for action against racial discrimination and xenophobia is now. I thank the Council for its attention and I look forward to an inspiring and lively dialogue.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Ms. Gay McDougall, member of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Ms. McDougall (Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination) First, I want to thank the General Assembly for this opportunity and honour to address it on behalf of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Each year, we meet on this day in solemn commemoration of the 69 lives lost in Sharpeville, South Africa, in 1960, as they protested apartheid, one of the vilest forms of de jure racism. Each year, the international community stops to measure our progress, to see how far humankind has been able to move beyond the worst of our nature, how far we have been able to move beyond the worst of racism. There has undoubtedly been progress. It was on this day, 21 March, in 1990 that Namibia tore free from apartheid South Africa.

The system of apartheid has now, of course, been dismantled. And the system of separate and unequal segregation, the regime into which I was born and raised in this country's South, has also been defeated. We all worked hard together to create the conditions that made progress possible. Today, however, the progress achieved over the past 50 years, since the adoption of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, is increasingly being jeopardized by threats coming from all parts of the globe.

In that respect, every day it becomes clearer to our Committee that there is a toxic climate created by inflammatory racist hate rhetoric that is being tolerated by political leaders at the highest levels who either fail to condemn it or adopt it as their own platform for elections. Their failure of leadership has opened the floodgates to the spread of the most damaging ideas of racial superiority and uninhibited expressions of hatred. Even in the richest regions of the world, the most disadvantaged segments of the population are increasingly being portrayed as threats to the economy, culture and values of the country in which they reside. Rather than being met by empathy, the most destitute and desperate children, women and men fleeing chaos are at times met with racist hate attacks, unscalable walls, detention camps, torture, sexual abuse or summary deportations.

Only a few years ago, it would have been unthinkable that our Committee would have reason to adopt a statement, as it did just last November, denouncing the auctioning of black male migrants into slavery as they sought refuge in Libya. At the same time, the international community that pledged "never again" is watching as hundreds of thousands of Rohingya villagers are facing refoulement and, certainly, genocide. Indigenous people are being robbed of their ancestral lands by development projects that take unconscionable advantage of the powerlessness of those communities created by past injustices.

By ratifying the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, all States have committed to adopting immediate and effective measures in the fields of education, culture and information, with a view to combating prejudices and promoting understanding and friendship among nations and racial or ethnic groups. It is at school that we learn to live together. In schools we learn to respect different cultures and develop the ability to value diversity. Education is one of the most powerful tools of inclusion, but there are new, worrisome trends, among them the increasing privatization of school systems, which has many consequences, such as increasing segregation and reinforcing inequalities in educational opportunities.

Media, particularly social media, play an important role in shaping people's social and political convictions. We know all too well how the deliberate manipulation of information can promote intolerance. For that reason, our Committee has been encouraging awareness among the media and urging its representatives to act based on the responsibility to increase diversity. Widely disseminated information campaigns calling attention to the harms produced by racist hate speech are critically important. As anti-migrant discourse started spiralling out of control, the Committee urged States to take proactive measures to change the narrative on migration to emphasize the positive contributions of

migrants and refugees, who bring innovation and enrich societies, cultures and economies across the world.

Finally, perhaps the most difficult challenge is to tackle the poverty and economic exclusion that are both a consequence and a cause of racial discrimination in every country. Those who have faced endemic discrimination are the poorest of the poor. They are often in a cycle of disadvantage and despair, and that cycle goes on for generation after generation, making their poverty more intractable. Our Committee's general recommendation no. 32, on special measures, along with Goal 10 of the Sustainable Development Goals, represents both commitments by States and tools that point the way to a more inclusive, equal and sustainable society, in which all will benefit equally. Nothing has been more powerful than the commitment, uttered here in the Hall, that States will leave no one behind in the future.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Gambia, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Tangara (Gambia): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of African States on the occasion of the commemorative event on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Our continent has suffered grave violations of human rights on account of racism. The practices of slavery, the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism and apartheid have inflicted severe pain and suffering on the human dignity of our peoples. We are concerned about the fact that even though those practices were discontinued many decades ago, their cascading effects continue to be felt in new forms, especially in today's globalized world. The peoples of our continent and from the global South are subjected to new and contemporary manifestations of racism, including, most importantly, incitement to hatred directed at migrants and refugees.

In the aftermath of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, the African Group is proud to have led flagship programmes for the eradication of all scourges of racism. To that end, our Group has identified substantive gaps in the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which must be filled in under the noble principle of human dignity and equality as a reality for all. The four areas that were identified and in need of international attention include xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and incitement to hatred, including through the use of media platforms. In the view of the African Group, the substantive gaps that I have just mentioned must be filled by formulating additional protocols to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. In that regard, we are grateful to the Government of Zimbabwe for its leadership with regard to current initiatives on additional protocols to the Convention focusing on incitement to hatred. Despite the odds, the African Group appreciates that our efforts have culminated in the General Assembly's successful proclamation of the International Decade for People of African Descent and the programme of activities for the implementation of the Programme for the Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination. We look forward with optimism to the midterm review of the Programme, which will be held in 2020.

Additionally, the African Group is determined to establish a permanent forum for people of African descent as a matter of urgency, priority and necessity. The living conditions of people of African descent in countries and jurisdictions where they are citizens are very worrisome owing to the discrimination to which they are subjected, particularly in the areas of housing, education, health and employment. The African Group pledges its solidarity with the peoples of South Africa on this special commemorative event as we reflect on the tragic loss of life on 21 March 1960.

The former Organization of African Unity played a leading role in ensuring that this day was recognized by the United Nations as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in memory of the tragic event in South Africa. While we congratulate South Africa — particularly on the gallant efforts that led to the installation of its first democratically elected President, Nelson Mandela, whose centenary we will celebrate throughout 2018 — we want to remind the United Nations of the present and contemporary dangers posed by racism. Their manifestations take the form of extreme ideologies such as white supremacy and populism. Those scourges negate the noble principles of inclusive societies and the embracing of diversity and tolerance as cherished values for the twenty-first century. The United Nations human rights system is therefore faced with the daunting task of ensuring that all of racism's evils are effectively combated.

The African Group will continue to lend its full support to United Nations initiatives aimed at promoting human dignity and equality, as envisaged in the 1948 United Nations International Bill of Human Rights.

(*spoke in French*)

We reiterate that in order to eradicate racism, it is important to prioritize education and the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue. We believe that through such dialogue we will further emphasize values that bring us together rather than divide us. Is it not said that the beauty of a Persian carpet lies in the variety of its colours? That will also enable us to combat certain ideologies that encourage us to use our traditions, customs and beliefs as criteria to distinguish between what is true and false and good and evil, thereby facilitating a cultural symbiosis that will lead us towards what the famous son of Africa Léopold Senghor called the civilization of the universal in the global village.

(*spoke in English*)

The African Group calls on the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to accord a high profile and visibility to United Nations programmes devoted to the elimination of racial discrimination through the allocation of adequate resources to the work of his Office, among other things. Furthermore, we offer our full support to the newly appointed Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and the full support of the African Group during her tenure.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asia-Pacific States.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar): I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the States members of the Group of Asia-Pacific States, as the Group's Chair for the month of March. We thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this meeting to commemorate and observe the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. We also extend our gratitude to the speakers who have shared their valuable work and visions regarding the elimination of racial discrimination.

The countries of our region are distinguished by a wide range of diversity in terms of ethnicity, language, religion and culture, which makes the theme of our meeting today — "Promoting tolerance, inclusion, unity and respect for diversity in the context of combating racial discrimination" — very relevant and important to our region. The Group of Asia-Pacific States is concerned about the increase in intolerance, hate, racial profiling and negative stereotyping based on people's religion, language, culture or ethnicity. That worrisome trend requires concrete actions underpinned by strong political will to mobilize all efforts at the national, regional and international levels to address all forms and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance through cooperation, partnerships and inclusion.

Education and awareness-raising about different cultures and religions play a critical role in promoting tolerance, acceptance and respect for diversity. We need to focus more on correcting misunderstandings, fighting negative stereotyping and promoting harmony and tolerance for the sake of cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. The Asia-Pacific Group reaffirms the importance of universal adherence to and the full and effective implementation of the 2001 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the outcome of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban in 2001 — the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action — as a firm foundation for combating all negative forms of racism and providing adequate remedies for victims. The States members of the Asia-Pacific Group are tirelessly working to find ways to promote the values of tolerance and acceptance of differences among people and spreading a culture of respect for diversity within our communities and among our nations and other nations of the world.

On behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group, I reiterate our strong commitment and unwavering determination to ensure that the struggle and fight for the elimination of racial discrimination remain a high priority in our respective countries and throughout the world.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Mr. Danon (Israel): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The United Nations calendar is filled with international days marking important events and topics,

but only a few are as closely linked as this one to the birth of the Organization. The Holocaust, during which 6 million Jews were slaughtered, was an unprecedented act of racial discrimination. Millions of men, women and children were systematically murdered under the guise of racial superiority. Today we come together as a united international community with the clear message, echoing the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that tolerance, inclusion, unity and respect for diversity are the right thing. There is no superior race. There is no superior religion or culture. We are all born as equals, with entitlements to the same rights and freedoms, free of distinctions.

Racial discrimination was and unfortunately still is one of the greatest ills of our world. That is why it is vital that we continue to fight that scourge. We must actively condemn such terrible acts and educate our children about diversity and tolerance if we truly want to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. We must join hands in remembering those who have been victims of racial discrimination.

At the heart of our global commitments to eliminate racial discrimination lies the almost universally ratified International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The independent experts of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination are dedicated to monitoring its implementation and helping to develop policies to fight these horrific manifestations of hatred. But the implementation of the Convention by States parties is not enough. We must work together with civil-society groups that monitor situations and alert Governments and the international community to instances of racism and racial discrimination. All of society must commit to that fight.

Unfortunately, current trends around the world show that racism is back on the rise. We have seen an alarming increase in racially motivated violence, propagated by hate speech that is becoming increasingly more difficult to counter in an era of technological advances.

On this International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, let us recommit to never being indifferent. As the late Nobel Peace Prize laureate Elie Wiesel once said, "Indifference, to me, is the epitome of evil". Let us speak out against all forms of racism. Let us use instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination to prevent situations from deteriorating. Let us celebrate diversity and cherish it so that history's darkest times do not repeat themselves. Finally, let us never forget that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Uruguay, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin America and Caribbean States.

Mr. Bermúdez Álvarez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Latin America and Caribbean States. At the outset, I would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, for convening this commemorative plenary meeting on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. I particularly welcome the Secretary-General and thank him for his briefing. I also wish to thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein; Ms. Tendayi Achiume, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; and Ms. Gay McDougall, member of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, for their participation in today's meeting.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and have the potential to contribute constructively to the development and well-being of their societies. In that regard, any doctrine of racial superiority is scientifically false, morally reprehensible, socially unjust and dangerous and must be rejected, together with theories that seek to establish the existence of separate human races. Fanaticism, discrimination and xenophobia run counter to international standards of human rights. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination gives us a legal basis for adopting all the necessary measures to quickly eliminate racial discrimination in all of its forms and manifestations and for preventing and combating racist doctrines and practices in order to promote understanding among races and build an international community free of all forms of racial segregation and discrimination.

Nevertheless, the exceptional importance of that legal instrument must be based on our moral duties as States to go beyond its provisions and take a proactive approach to eliminating all forms of discrimination.

Moreover, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the most recent authoritative reiteration of the call to ensure equal opportunities and to do away with discrimination. We stress that development cannot be sustainable unless it is enjoyed by all, nor when social and economic systems create stratified societies that separate people not by their effort, contribution, merit or achievement but by their nationality, race or gender.

States have made great efforts and taken many initiatives to prevent racial discrimination, segregation, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance with a view to ensuring all their peoples' full enjoyment of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, without distinction. Regrettably, despite those efforts, millions of human beings continue to be victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, including its modern forms and manifestations, some of which are extremely violent. There are a great many legal instruments that incorporate the principles of freedom, equality and non-discrimination. Nevertheless, we must still work to guarantee that those legal texts lead to the full exercise of those rights. That obligation falls on each and every Member State.

The member States of the Latin American and Caribbean Group condemn in the strongest terms the ongoing and resurgent scourges of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance in many regions of the world, and we commit to undertaking concrete measures to prevent and condemn such actions. Many of the countries in our region are comprised of multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual populations, a mosaic of men and women who emigrated from regions encompassing all world ethnicities. We recognize that the diversity of our populations is our strength. That is why we are deeply concerned about the proliferation of political campaigns based on discrimination and racism.

Our societies are enriched by the diversity of our people. We understand that promoting the full participation and contribution of all of our people is of vital importance, and that sustainable development is unachievable unless it reaches all people, regardless of race, colour, lineage and national or ethnic origin. We share a comprehensive vision of international migration based on human rights that rejects the criminalization of irregular migration, as well as all versions of racism, xenophobia and discrimination against migrants, and one that recognizes the contributions of migrants in their countries of origin and destination.

It is vital that migration policies respect fundamental human rights and take into account national security. That is a necessary and delicate balancing act, particularly because the families of migrants are often subjected to measures that violate their basic human rights, unity and integrity. It is for those reasons that our region remains committed to key initiatives and processes, such as the intergovernmental negotiations under way on a global compact for safe, regular and orderly migration. We believe that regardless of their migration status, the human rights of all migrants and their contribution to sustainable development should be at the forefront of discussions.

The members of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States will continue to support and spearhead our joint efforts here at the United Nations to fulfil their obligations under the Charter of the United Nations to reaffirm our faith in fundamental human rights, the dignity and worth of the human person, the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom and to that end, to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belarus, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. Rybakov (Belarus): I have to honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

I would like to express our gratitude to the President of the General Assembly for keeping this topic on the agenda of the United Nations. We would also like to acknowledge all the other important initiatives of the General Assembly aimed at raising awareness about the suffering of the victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, related intolerance and all forms of discrimination.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. The Charter of the United Nations is based on the principle of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted at the

World Conference in South Africa in 2001, remain as a set of important guidelines for international, regional and national action against racism.

Today, on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, we come together to reaffirm our commitment and leadership in scaling up our endeavours to put an end to racial discrimination in all its forms and manifestations and to ensure the fundamental freedoms of human beings worldwide. We remain committed to combating racism and racial discrimination, which is a priority on our human rights agenda. We would like to reaffirm that the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination should remain the basis of all efforts to prevent, combat and eradicate racism.

We reiterate the importance of ratifying and fully implementing the Convention, which should be a priority for all countries. It goes without saying that we have made considerable progress in the global fight against racism and racial discrimination in recent decades. However, we remain alarmed by the manifestations of racial discrimination in some areas of the world. The consensus on fighting racism must be a priority for the entire international community through the full implementation of the Convention and other relevant human rights treaties.

Combating racism is still an urgent task. The impact of racism should not be underestimated. Racism constitutes serious violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, impedes equal opportunity, devalues individuals, divides communities, breeds fear and spurs animosity between and among societies. Nelson Mandela once said,

> "No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

We must bring together humankind within a framework of common values to confront fanaticism, hatred, extremism and terrorism, with a view to creating an environment conducive to building human relations and respect for human rights, based on the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We must take additional concerted international action to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

We emphasize the importance of addressing with greater resolve and political will all forms and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in all spheres of life and in all parts of the world. We will continue to promote inclusiveness, acceptance and equality around the globe and never stop working for a safer, more equal and more respectful world based on international law. Racial discrimination and racial intolerance must become a closed chapter of our history.

Mr. Montwedi (South Africa): South Africa fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Gambia on behalf of the Group of African States.

The South African Government appreciates the unique honour of being invited to speak at today's important commemorative event on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The theme decided on for today's event could not have come at a more opportune time, particularly in view of the current resurgent ideologies of supremacy and national populism in many parts of the world.

South Africa is grateful and honoured that the General Assembly and United Nations human rights mechanisms decided to designate 21 March as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. That fundamental decision was taken in memory of the tragedy of Sharpeville, where 69 innocent compatriots of mine lost their lives at the hands of the brutal apartheid system. Those individuals, and the masses who joined them on that day, were simply demanding the restoration of their human dignity and equality. In response, the apartheid regime reacted by inflicting the worst tragedy and repressive acts on the heroes and comrades of our national liberation struggle. The South African Government observes 21 March as Human Rights Day, based on the same rationale as the United Nations.

As many in this Hall will recall, the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, and the late President Nelson Mandela joined hands in partnership to lead the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, in producing a landmark pledge aimed at the eradication of all the scourges of racism. The pledge, which was entitled "Tolerance and Diversity: A Vision for the 21st Century", resonates extremely well with

and complements the theme chosen for this special occasion today.

Out of those themes, and together with the global movements against racism, it is increasingly clear that the peoples of the world have reached zero tolerance for the evils of racism, which undermine our humanity, peaceful coexistence and human dignity. In essence, racism flies in the face of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the two core International Covenants on human rights.

The year 2018 marks the centenary of the late President Nelson Mandela — a global icon, freedom fighter and passionate advocate for human rights, including women's rights, gender equality and the rights of the child. The South African Government has embarked on a year-long programme, both domestic and international, to celebrate the life and legacy of our global icon.

Today, as we celebrate this commemorative event it is the legacy of Nelson Mandela that we should remember and embody, particularly his fierce dedication to the fight against racism and racial discrimination and his vision of unity, tolerance and social cohesion within and among nations. The world community, particularly children and young people, must be taught that racism is a vice, not a value. The repugnance of racism should not be an obstacle to our building inclusive societies, as contemplated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

As I move towards my conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the South African Government had the honour of being invited by the United Nations to host the third United Nations Conference Against Racism in 2001 in our beloved city of Durban. We are pleased that resolution 72/157 acknowledges that the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action remains the only instructive outcome document to confront all the scourges of racism. It is a practical outcome that is action-oriented, forward-looking and capable of being implemented by all States and stakeholders committed to eradicating the scourges of racism. The document prescribes concrete measures and effective remedies in all cases of violations of human rights resulting from racist acts.

South Africa encourages States Members of the United Nations, especially those that have not yet done so, to demonstrate their commitment to the fight against racism by ratifying the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, withdrawing their reservations to that principal instrument, particularly its articles 4 and 5, and making the requisite declarations in accordance with article 14 of the Convention. The United Nations cannot afford to pause, even for a while, until the scourges of racism are eliminated and all the peoples of the world enjoy freedom and dignity.

Mrs. Rodríguez Camejo (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Uruguay on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Seventeen years after the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, its full implementation remains a pending issue on the path towards the full enjoyment of equal rights for all human beings. The effective implementation of the Durban Declaration is a challenge and a moral obligation, not only to resolve the grave situations of discrimination that we currently face worldwide but also to settle the debt owed to the millions of victims of those abominable practices throughout history. To achieve that goal, we need national and international political will and the consolidation of a genuine culture of peace, international cooperation and solidarity.

We note with deep concern that, far from diminishing, the manifestations of racism and xenophobia are growing and assuming new and sophisticated forms. Even more worrisome, this is happening precisely as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights approaches its seventieth anniversary and Member States are engaging in intensive discussions to ensure that, as a result of the ongoing reform process, we can move the United Nations closer to what our peoples need.

Furthermore, this year, as we engage in important negotiation processes for adopting global compacts on migrants and refugees, we regret that such manifestations of intolerance are increasing and targeting the very people coming from the various cultures and regions of the world where war, violence and poverty are widespread. Discussions on matters such as these are an opportunity that all States must seize in order to strengthen international cooperation in fighting racial discrimination, overcoming exclusionist stereotypes and respecting human dignity, regardless of national, ethnic or religious origin.

Cuba is firm in its willingness to support and promote all actions taken to implement the Durban

Declaration. It is time to end discrimination against entire races, ethnicities, nations and communities. Effective measures must be taken to eliminate the root causes of those problems, including underdevelopment, poverty and social exclusion. We reiterate our commitment to continuing to support that effort. Accordingly, we reaffirm our willingness to continue to implement the programme of activities for the International Decade for People of African Descent at the national level, and to support the work of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Cubans are proud of the diverse origins of our nation, which has been formed through the contributions of many peoples. That pride is expressed in practice through the clear political resolve of our State and Government to fight any manifestation of racism or intolerance and to implement an economic and social policy that does not discriminate against anyone on any grounds, as well as in its international solidarity without exclusions. It is also expressed through the exercise of a highly participatory democracy in which all Cubans enjoy equal rights, regardless of their origin, skin colour, creed or political opinion. At this very moment, Cuba is in the final stage of a general election process in which 85.65 per cent of the more than 8 million Cubans with the right to vote have gone to the polls and freely expressed their majority support for the building and continuous improvement of an economic, political and social project based on justice, solidarity, human well-being and an increasingly prosperous and sustainable socialism.

In reaffirming its strong commitment to promoting and respecting all human rights for all, Cuba will continue to engage in the fight against racism and other forms of discrimination in order to promote peoples' rights and respect for diversity.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): All human beings are born equal in dignity and rights. Any doctrine or practice of racial superiority is legally and morally unacceptable and cannot be justified on any grounds. We cannot emphasize this enough.

The universal ratification and effective implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination is imperative in the fight to eliminate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. We are deeply concerned about the emergence of severe challenges to the effective implementation of the Convention and the global fight against all forms of racism. Time and again, migrants and other vulnerable groups continue to fall victim to alarming levels of unequal treatment, prejudice, stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, intolerance, hostility, violent attacks, hate crimes and adverse public discourse.

Our world is increasingly facing the pressing need to seriously and immediately address contemporary trends that translate into new forms of racism, such as xenophobic nationalism, Islamophobia and antisemitism. Hostility and hate crimes are having a serious impact on the sense of security among Muslim and migrant communities generally. These incidents remain severely underdocumented and underreported throughout the world. Portraying them as single incidents or bias-motivated incidents against individuals seriously undermines efforts to address the root causes of the problem. It is therefore important to step up efforts in monitoring and reporting such hate crimes, as well as in collecting data, in order to shed more light on the extent of manifestations of hostility towards members of certain religions, migrants and vulnerable groups of society.

The scourge of racism, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance has dangerously evolved into serious and concrete threats to global peace and social harmony. The theme of this year's International Day on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination — "Promote tolerance, inclusion, unity and respect for diversity in the context of combating racial discrimination" — is particularly pertinent. We should make use of it to seek ways and means to inspire tolerance and address contemporary trends of racism and discrimination. It is crucially important to ensure that prominent personalities, particularly politicians and media representatives in countries where discriminatory acts frequently take place, use uniting rhetoric rather than divisive remarks.

We must not forget that we carry a moral and legal obligation to protect the right of individuals to be free from any kind of discrimination. The fight against all forms and manifestations of discrimination and intolerance will be successful only if the international community as a whole urgently and effectively addresses the issue.

Mr. Ajayi (Nigeria): My delegation welcomes this commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, given the importance of the subject in facilitating peaceful coexistence and harmony among nations.

Nigeria aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of the Republic of the Gambia on behalf of the Group of African States, and would like to underscore the following in its national capacity.

A cardinal objective of Nigerian foreign policy is the elimination of racial discrimination in all its ramifications. That is based on the demographic fact that one of every four Africans is a Nigerian. The fact that Nigeria is home to the largest concentration anywhere in the world of black men and women — the race that has suffered the most prejudice on the basis of racial discrimination — has reinforced our belief that racial discrimination is not only anti-development, but is also a serious pathological disorder that has no place in modern history. Our unwavering commitment to the elimination of racial discrimination has consistently placed Nigeria at the forefront of global campaigns and efforts aimed at eliminating that scourge.

Nigeria's credentials in the global fight against racial discrimination stand out in the comity of nations. For more than 20 years during the former era of apartheid in the Republic of South Africa, Nigeria provided the needed leadership, with strong commitments, resoluteness, resilience and determination to steer the ship of the United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid and champion the cause of the majority people of South Africa. That consistency also ensured that Nigeria, despite being geographically far removed from southern Africa, was admitted as a reliable member of the club of front-line States.

The occasion marking the International Day of Racial Discrimination has called for a renewed commitment to consolidating the successes recorded with the abolition of the slave trade, colonialism and apartheid, and to ensuring that their cascading effects, which are still being felt among people of African descent, are completely eliminated. In recent years, the world has witnessed a growing wave of xenophobia, religious extremism, hate campaigns, Islamophobia and a host of other negative vices that are posing serious challenges to peaceful coexistence. These tendencies are capable of rolling back the gains achieved over the years, especially as extremist groups are taking advantage of them to propagate slogans bordering on hatred. This is a clarion call on all peace-loving nations to redouble their efforts and build synergies across religious, ethnic and geographic barriers in order to jointly defeat these terrorist groups.

Nigeria supports the call for establishing a permanent forum for people of African descent as a way of providing strong support to global efforts to eliminate contemporary manifestations of racial discrimination. Africans, as the worst hit, need a permanent platform that will help to articulate African interests and aspirations. We pledge our commitment to implementing the provisions of the relevant instruments that forbid and abhor racial discrimination and call for its total elimination in all its forms. We also acknowledge the creation of the office of the special mandate holders on racial discrimination as a way of providing needed oversight on all acts, conduct and actions that might constitute or pose challenges to the global effort to fight racial discrimination, xenophobia, racism and related intolerance.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in this commemorative meeting.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 70?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.